

## Gimme some green

### 1 Warmer

a. Briefly discuss these questions. Give reasons for your answers.

- What green business strategies are companies using to work towards sustainability?
- What changes are needed in markets to really drive sustainability? Think about the following industries:
  - Housing
  - Food / Agriculture
  - Transportation
  - Fashion
- How should companies and governments work together to make sure climate targets are reached?

### 2 Key words

a. Read the definitions and find key words in the article that match them. The section number is given in brackets to help you. Check your answers and your understanding of the words are by using the same word to complete the example sentence immediately after each definition.

1. late, not done when needed (introduction)

*Some of our internal policies were written more than ten years ago. I'd say a review is long \_\_\_\_\_.*

2. the point in time when a change or effect cannot be prevented (paragraph 2)

*Climate and biodiversity experts warn that the world is at a(n) \_\_\_\_\_.*

3. to affect something radically drastically (paragraph 4)

*Doomsayers are worried that AI will \_\_\_\_\_ the world as we know it.*

4. the present condition (paragraph 5)

*The key question is how to disrupt the \_\_\_\_\_ to address climate change.*

5. a formal promise, especially one to give money (paragraph 8)

*The company wants to \_\_\_\_\_ one million dollars to research and development of clean energy.*

6. to increase very quickly (paragraph 8)

*The need for affordable housing solutions will \_\_\_\_\_ as tenants spend on average forty per cent of their income on rent.*

7. to try to persuade the government or another official group that something should or should not happen or should be changed (paragraph 10)  
*Several businesses have come together to \_\_\_\_\_ for climate solutions.*
8. large, affecting many people or things (paragraph 10)  
*The new CEO has announced \_\_\_\_\_ changes to the organisation as she is under pressure to boost performance.*
9. a large amount of (paragraph 12)  
*A(n) \_\_\_\_\_ of statistics suggest that there has been a sixty-nine per cent decline in wildlife populations over fifty years.*
10. to withdraw or stop supporting something, or to say that you did not mean something you said (paragraph 13)  
*Regretfully, the car manufacturer recently \_\_\_\_\_ on their pledge to produce fully electric vehicles in the next six years.*
11. able to be decided by a person or group of people rather than being dictated by rules (paragraph 13)  
*Employees are encouraged to recycle and use resources responsibly, but really sustainability efforts are seen as something \_\_\_\_\_, not obligatory.*
12. forceful or expressed in a way that does not try to avoid upsetting people (paragraph 16)  
*Greta Thunberg's \_\_\_\_\_ criticisms have been an inspiration to other activists.*
13. feeling disappointed (paragraph 17)  
*We were all very much \_\_\_\_\_ by the annual environmental report. We had hoped for better results.*
14. to reduce something to an earlier standard or level (paragraph 17)  
*They are \_\_\_\_\_ laws that protect natural areas, but several environmental agencies are putting up a fight.*

## Companies are finally reforming their sustainability policies

*AN OVERDUE PUSH TO RESHAPE MARKETS, NOT JUST INDIVIDUAL COMPANIES, IS UNDER WAY AT LAST*

PILITA CLARK

- 1 Is corporate sustainability as we know it finally over? Are traditional green business strategies failing to the point that they are doing more harm than good?
- 2 Perhaps not entirely. But the growing number of sustainable business leaders calling for a rethink of these measures suggests a tipping point is at hand.
- 3 For those of us who have never thought it likely that businesses and the markets that shape them would be enough to fix the gathering menace of climate change, this realisation is overdue.
- 4 But it's not trivial. There may not be enough time to upend capitalism but there is plenty of time for companies to push for markets to be reformed in ways that drive faster climate action.
- 5 So it has been a relief to see a rising recognition that the status quo is not working.
- 6 Or as Lindsay Hooper and Paul Gilding from the venerable Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership put it in a paper this month, "it is time we questioned the founding ideas and dominant approaches in the corporate sustainability movement".
- 7 The Cambridge university-based institute is a prominent voice in corporate greenery, thanks in part to the backing it has had for most of its 36-year history from its royal conservationist patron, King Charles III.
- 8 But as Hooper and Gilding point out, despite years of green corporate pledges, and mushrooming clean tech investments, "the sustainability crisis is deepening".
- 9 Worse, businesses and their sustainability advisers may be adding to the problem by giving a false impression of progress that is delaying "required radical changes to markets and the policies that frame them".
- 10 The pair say companies should go beyond setting targets for cutting their own carbon footprints and start lobbying for sweeping, long-term rules that reshape entire markets.
- 11 For a start, this approach should lower the competitive risks that green business pioneers often face.
- 12 Another big advantage has been laid bare this year by the slew of green corporate U-turns, from Shell's weakening of climate targets to Volvo's delayed deadline for selling only fully electric cars.
- 13 Such backtracking underlines the fact that sustainability measures are still often seen as discretionary moves, taken by personally committed leaders and easily undone when times are tough.
- 14 As another sustainability veteran, John Elkington, wrote last month: "We must become less dependent on the goodwill and good citizenship of individual business leaders, both of which can be fragile foundations for sustained commitment."
- 15 Elkington knows of what he speaks. He coined corporate sustainability ideas such as "triple bottom line" reporting to measure social and environmental, as well as financial, performance. But as he wrote last month, sustainability can no longer be only about transforming businesses. "Increasingly, too, it must be about transforming markets."
- 16 A more strident case for the perils of relying on green-minded leaders has come from Jonathon Porritt, a sustainability campaigner who has spent years advising large companies, including Unilever.
- 17 The consumer goods giant has dismayed green activists by rolling back targets on measures such as plastic use and recycling following last year's appointment of a new CEO, Hein Schumacher.

*Continued on next page*

- 18 His approach marks a sharp break with that of former Unilever bosses like Paul Polman, who memorably told investors who didn't approve of his sustainability efforts "don't put your money in our company".
- 19 For Porritt, "Unilever's fall from grace reveals the deep flaws in that whole concept of corporate sustainability as a primary driver of more sustainable ways of creating and distributing wealth."
- 20 So will much change? Maybe. Talk of the need for greater regulation was in the air at last week's New York Climate Week, as it would be.
- 21 Jes Munk Hansen, chief executive of the Danish insulation maker, Rockwool, told one event that regulators could slash the sizeable carbon emissions from buildings by setting tougher standards.
- 22 Government rules had helped to drive the shift away from incandescent light bulbs to more energy efficient lights, said Hansen, a former executive at the Osram lighting group.
- 23 As he told me later, "It would help the green transition greatly if building regulators used more tools such as higher energy efficiency standards."
- 24 He is right. Regulators and governments could do more, and some firms are pushing them to do so. But these companies are still in a minority. A lot more must join them if corporate sustainability is ever going to create a more sustainable world.

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Pilita Clark, 28 September, 2024.

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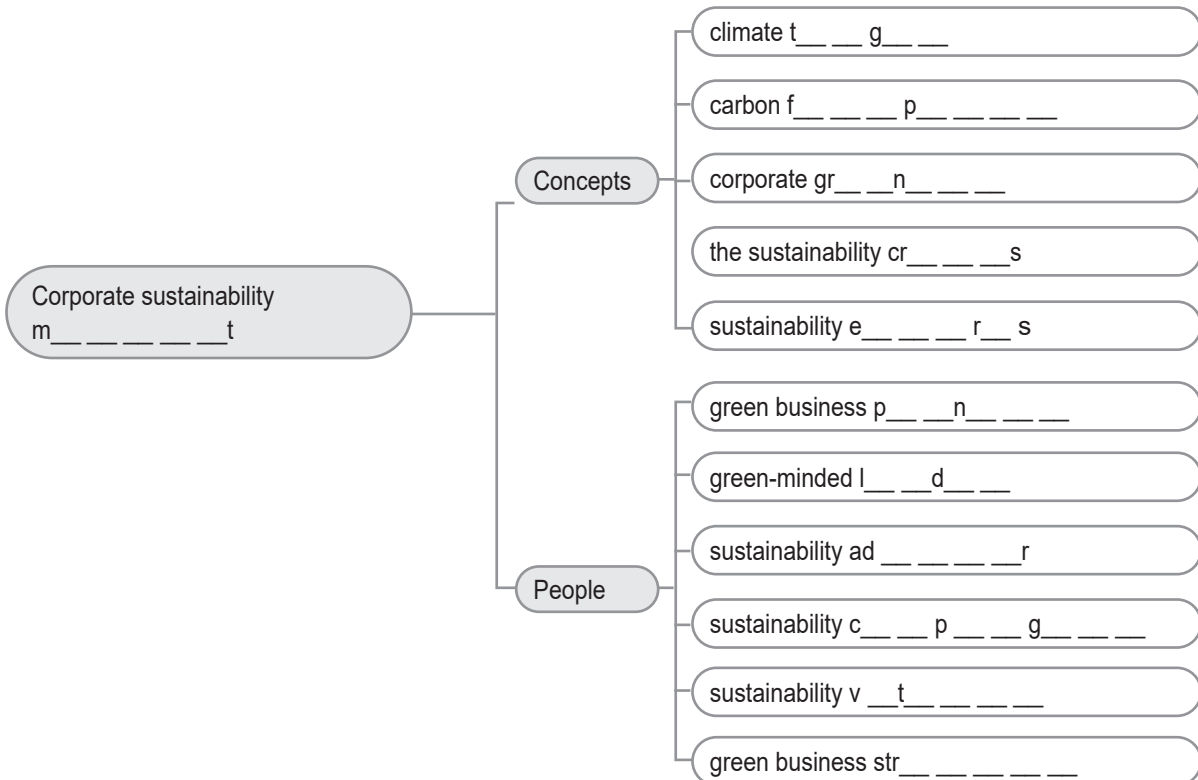
### 3 Understanding the article

a. Answer the questions about the article.

1. What are a growing number of sustainable business leaders calling for?
2. What should we question according to Lindsay Hooper and Paul Gilding?
3. How do Hooper and Gilding say that some businesses are making the problem worse?
4. What do Hooper and Gilding think we really need?
5. What have both Shell and Volvo recently backtracked on?
6. Where does John Elkington believe real change should come from?
7. What does, triple bottom line, reporting refer to?
8. How is Unilever's new CEO's approach a 'sharp break with that of former Unilever bosses'?
9. What was Paul Polman famous for?
10. What does Jes Munk think regulators should do?

### 4 Business language – sustainability

a. Write letters to complete the phrases from the article. Then find and circle each phrase in the article.



Advanced

b. Choose phrases from task a and use them to write six sentences.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

## 5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- Do you agree that businesses 'may be adding to the problem by giving a false impression of progress that is delaying required radical changes to markets and the policies that frame them'?
- What radical changes to markets do you think are necessary to address the climate crisis?
- Should regulators and governments have stronger sustainability regulations to force the industries' hands? What regulations would you like to see implemented first?
- Can consumers influence companies to become greener? How?

## 6 Wider business theme – greenwashing

a. Work through the steps of this task with a partner. You will then present your ideas and product suggestions to the rest of the group.

1. Read the tips about spotting greenwashing and discuss them with a partner. Try to think of any examples of your own that you can name for each tip.

### Four tips: how to spot greenwashing

Greenwashing refers to the actions or activities that make people believe a business is doing more to protect the environment than it really is. Here are four tips on how to spot this kind of trickery.

**Tip 1.** Vague words and phrases like *sustainable*, *green*, *natural* or *eco-friendly* could mean many different things. For example, natural doesn't always mean good. Several natural substances are very toxic to living things! Make sure to research and look into the details of these claims to find evidence that supports them.

**Tip 2.** Green imagery can give us the false impression that something is environmentally friendly. Even just using earth colours like brown, green and blue can deceive consumers. Once again, research is needed to determine if this is a true image of the company or just a marketing ploy.

**Tip 3.** Not all environmental claims are equally relevant. Sustainability is a holistic undertaking, so watch out for businesses that claim sustainability from a single angle. Look beyond the product ingredients to other things like the packaging and logistics and the impact these have on the environment.

**Tip 4.** Companies that don't provide information or proof of their green efforts on their labels or websites are most likely not that green. Expect full transparency. Third-party certification is the best way to know a company's level of actual environmental responsibility.

2. Choose an organisation that works in one of the following industries:
  - Housing
  - Food / Agriculture
  - Transportation
  - Fashion
3. Follow the tips to evaluate their level of corporate sustainability. Look for evidence on their website or product labels. Note down examples.
4. Report your findings to the rest of the group. Compare the different companies' approaches. What can they learn from each other? Are there any practices that you would like to see implemented at your own organisation?

### Extension

Explore a sustainability certification (like LEED, B Corporation, FairTrade, Green Seal, etc.).

Do you think certifications like these should be required to hold companies responsible?